

The World Bank and ProVention

International Disaster Relief and Protection of Cultural Heritage

When disaster strikes in the developing world, chances are that the World Bank and the ProVention Consortium will be on the scene. With their central mission to alleviate poverty and promote socio-economic development, these two organizations inevitably are called upon to provide assistance. In many cases cultural heritage is damaged. As part of its disaster response and when requested, the Bank will work with governments and communities to protect and rehabilitate key cultural assets.

The poor are particularly vulnerable to loss when natural disasters strike. In historic cities where cultural sites are dense, whether in Mexico City or Tblisi, Georgia, low income households are often proportionally over-represented and thus are more likely to suffer when disaster hits. They are also less likely to be able to mobilize the resources needed to repair damaged historic buildings. Natural disasters often aggravate already vulnerable situations. Chronic lack of maintenance of historic buildings and inadequate infrastructure services exacerbate damage from disasters. In the case of the historic center of Tblisi, buildings already weakened by water dam-

age from leaking pipes and inadequate maintenance were dealt a death blow by earthquakes which brought historic buildings down on their inhabitants heads

The World Bank is the largest of the international development agencies; and the ProVention Consortium is a global coalition of governments, international organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations aimed at reducing disaster impacts.

The World Bank's Experience

The World Bank has extensive experience in reconstruction after disasters. Since 1980, the Bank financed some 200 disaster-related projects of which about half were for reconstruction (over US\$7.5 billion lending) and half included components for mitigation (over US\$6.5 billion lending). Over time, the Bank's understanding of the importance of the built historic environment and its experience in heritage conservation have grown, and consequently disaster projects today are more likely to include measures to rehabilitate cultural heritage.

Emergency projects account for about 70% of the reconstruction operations approved by the Bank since 1980. Borrowers generally give a high priority to housing reconstruction after a natural disaster, but Bank projects focus more on repairing infrastructure and damaged community facilities as well as economic recovery through emergency import support.

Reducing Losses

The Bank and borrowers are now developing a greater awareness of the need to mitigate or reduce the adverse effects of natural disasters before they strike. Most of the natural disaster mitigation projects have addressed three likely weather-related events: floods, forest fires, and droughts. Institutional development is extremely important for mitigation to promote disaster awareness, planning, and early warning systems. As part of institutional development, the enforce-

Reconstruction of traditional housing. Photo courtesy Donald Hankey.



ment of land-use and building codes to avoid settlement in areas prone to hazards or in vulnerable structures has been widely pursued by these projects.

The Bank has financed a number of projects in historic cities. For example, in 1996 the Government of China requested the World Bank's assistance after an earthquake in Lijang, Yunnan province. The cultural heritage component of the project concentrated on the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and conservation of the historic town and traditional buildings in the province (especially Lijang and Dayan City), paying particular attention to improving the safety of traditional buildings.

The Chinese were very eager to make immediate repairs, and the Bank worked with their counterparts and the Lijang municipal government to ensure adequate control of the quality of work and materials so that work would be carried out in a manner to reduce the impact of future disasters, introduce improved sanitation and services into housing, safeguard the historic environment in Lijang and elsewhere, and provide training for local residents and construction industry to disseminate best practice in earthquake resistant building techniques. The project is now in the final stages of implementation and Lijang has been proposed for listing under the World Heritage Convention.

Projects such as the El Nino Emergency Assistance in Bolivia or the Georgia Cultural Heritage Project have helped rehabilitate historic towns damaged by natural disasters. The Bank also has many post-conflict projects that help repair countries destroyed by civil strife. Bosnia, West Bank-Gaza, and Romania are cases in which cultural heritage conservation activities have been undertaken. A series of projects that have supported national inventories of cultural heritage, in such countries as Tunisia, Yemen, and Georgia, represent Bank financing for planning tools that will be useful in the case of a disaster.

Priority Issues

There are many imperatives that can be drawn from Bank experience of natural disasters that are relevant to the goal of sustainable development and to improving protection of cultural heritage:

- Incorporate disaster management into development planning;
- Assess natural disaster damage and loss potential as part of overall development work;

- Calculate the costs and benefits of natural disaster management and use to weigh decisions;
- Share the costs and benefits of natural disaster management with potential victims;
- Get the appropriate incentives for disaster management—and get them right.

We may well ask why mitigation measures have not been incorporated into national policy. There are three major constraints that hinder mitigation investment in developing countries. These constraints are also opportunities for conserving cultural heritage by adapting traditional building materials and methods.

Affordability. Low-income urban families find it difficult to afford investments to strengthen their dwellings to make them more disaster resistant. Thus, raising their incomes through economic and social development must remain a top priority and the availability of low-cost technologies to reinforce dwellings can be beneficial. It is also important for governments to review legislation and regulations that effectively encourage lack of maintenance. For example, controls setting ceilings on rental payments leave landlords without the means to pay the proper maintenance of their properties so that structures deteriorate and become vulnerable to disasters.

Cost effectiveness. Emphasis on lowest cost solutions for construction may not always lead to disaster resistant structures. Mitigation must be factored into cost effectiveness, which may often lead to the use of local materials and technologies, when proven to be resistant to further damage from disasters.

Short attention spans. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, with images of human and material losses vivid, mitigation investment is a high priority in both the eyes of communities at risk and local and central governments. This fades quickly with time. It is imperative that decision makers have rapid access to information about the cultural heritage and traditional building materials and techniques of proven durability.

While constraints to mitigation investment should be removed to ensure that incentives are in place, they need to be financially worthwhile. For example, if a government rewards a household with a new dwelling to replace a poorly maintained historic one lost in an earthquake, it is an incentive for other households to disregard necessary maintenance. To compound this wrong message, authorities sometimes overlook households that take mitigation measures to reduce the



Tbilisi, Georgia,
earthquake
damage. Photo
by the author.

risk of losses. Similarly if the amount of multilateral assistance offered to disaster-struck countries is proportional to the losses and damages they suffer, then countries have no incentive to mitigate their vulnerability to natural disasters.

ProVention Consortium

Recognizing disaster risk reduction as a feature of sustainable economic and social development has motivated changes in the way in which disasters will be handled. The World Bank's Disaster Management Facility was established in July 1998, to provide proactive leadership in introducing disaster prevention and mitigation practices into development-related activities and improving emergency response. A year later this was followed by the first meeting of the Consortium on Natural and Technological Catastrophes (now ProVention) which gave impetus to the formulation of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to disaster management. The Consortium functions as a network to share knowledge and to connect and leverage resources to reduce disaster risk.

ProVention Consortium projects focus on the links between disasters, poverty, and the environment and fall into three general categories: hazard and risk identification, risk reduction, and risk sharing/transfer. Some projects involve a mix of such activities. Outputs include research projects, pilot and demonstration projects, education and training activities, and workshops and conferences. From the outset, the importance of cultural assets has been noted.

The Consortium aims to mainstream disaster reduction best practice into donor and beneficiary policies, disseminate best practice to gov-

ernment and institutions, strengthen specialized institutions in the developing world, and expand knowledge on disaster prevention. Constituted by more than 70 organizations, it shares worldwide experience on policies and practices to reduce vulnerability and negative impacts of natural and technological disasters in disaster-prone developing countries. To reduce losses from natural and technological disasters, ProVention concentrates on four complementary actions: donor coordination; promotion of a culture of safety through education, training, and dissemination; forging links among public, private, and civil society and between the scientific community and policy makers; and support for pilot projects.

The Developing World

There is a pattern of high vulnerability of cultural heritage in the developing world to natural disasters, a weak record of implementation of protective measures to control or limit damage, exacerbated negative impacts, and lengthy recovery time. Among the causes of this vulnerability is the inadequate knowledge of appropriate mitigation measures and of the assets themselves.

Bridging the worlds of international development, disaster relief, construction industries, and cultural resource management can result in real advances in protecting the historic built environment. But it entails adjustment in key policies:

Knowledge. Inventories of cultural heritage need to be compiled, and cost effective products and techniques for mitigation and reconstruction of historic buildings need to be developed.

Delivery. Knowledge about reducing vulnerability of historic buildings needs to be transferred from experts to the people affected.

Decisions. Policy makers will need to be convinced of the importance of adopting vulnerability reduction measures and make decisions accordingly. A quantitative framework is useful for evaluating options. Relatively simple loss estimation techniques could have important roles in defining cost-effective and appropriate strategies.

Those responsible for cultural resources in the developing world may wish to work with the World Bank and ProVention in order to reduce disaster risks and impacts.

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